



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to HCNM Ekeus

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Douglas A. Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 20, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to welcome High Commissioner Ekeus and congratulate him and his entire staff on the tenth anniversary of his office. Ten years ago this organization took a visionary step by creating an office that, as Ambassador Ekeus noted, is unique not only because of its focus on minority issues, but because of its legitimate ability to intervene in national affairs. This approach has resulted in effective conflict prevention. Over these years the geographic focus of the High Commissioner's Office has broadened.

Today, we are encouraged by the new dialogue arising from Turkey's invitation to Ambassador Ekeus for an initial, unprecedented visit. We hope that the High Commissioner will be invited to return again soon to follow-up on those discussions, and we note that Turkey's reforms allowing limited use of non-Turkish languages in broadcasting and education are positive developments.

Likewise, we see the High Commissioner beginning to work more in Central Asia, where problems for minorities, including Russian minorities, when compounded by a continuing struggle to establish democratic institutions and rule of law, may have the real potential to spark into conflicts.

In this regard, we are pleased that High Commissioner Ekeus was able to travel to Turkmenistan last November. Close cooperation with the High Commissioner, which would include inviting him to return to Turkmenistan soon, would begin to show a willingness on the part of the Turkmen authorities to cooperate with the OSCE. We remain concerned about the minority rights in Turkmenistan, particularly those of the ethnic-Uzbek and Russian minorities.

But Mr. Chairman, inter-ethnic and minority issues are not unique to any one part of the OSCE region.

We welcome the High Commissioner's continuing focus on minority issues in the Balkans, where close attention to these issues must be maintained, even as the OSCE shifts more responsibilities to the EU and local authorities. The High Commissioner on National Minorities is a singularly unique institution in the pan-European spectrum and we believe it continues to have much to add.

We welcome the adoption of the Croatian Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities and we support the High Commissioner in his efforts to continue working with Croatian authorities to facilitate the implementation of the newly adopted law.

We encourage Serbia and Montenegro also to continue working closely with High Commissioner Ekeus to ensure that the two Republics maintain an equally high degree of standards in protecting the rights of national minorities.

We support the High Commissioner in his work together with the OSCE Mission in Skopje, in helping Macedonian authorities implement the Ohrid agreement specifically in the areas minority language media, secondary education, and the training of ethnic lawyers, judges, prosecutors, and police.

The police academy in Macedonia can learn from the example of the Kosovo Police Service School, which has met and even exceeded its goals for training ethnic minorities.

We hope that the High Commissioner will also be involved in the police project in Kyrgyzstan, to look at any issues relating to minorities there. We look forward to his upcoming visit to that country.

We welcome the High Commissioner's continued consultations with the Latvian authorities, most recently in his December visit. We also look forward to hearing about his planned visit to Estonia once the new government is in place.

Finally, we are extremely pleased to hear that High Commissioner Ekeus is continuing his work in Georgia and that he plans to go there in the next two weeks. We support his language training projects to help integrate the minority population in Javakhetia into mainstream Georgian society and we would also encourage him to consider developing projects that would help improve the economic situation for minorities in that region.

In closing, I would again like to offer full U.S. support for the High Commissioner. We look forward to continuing cooperation and a heightened attention to the issue of national minorities, which would culminate in the special session on National Minorities.

Thank you.